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THE
IBERNIAN ESSAY
ON THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,
THE CAUSES OF THEIR DECLENSION.

BY A FRIEND OF THE FRIENDS.

“Seek, and ye shall find.”

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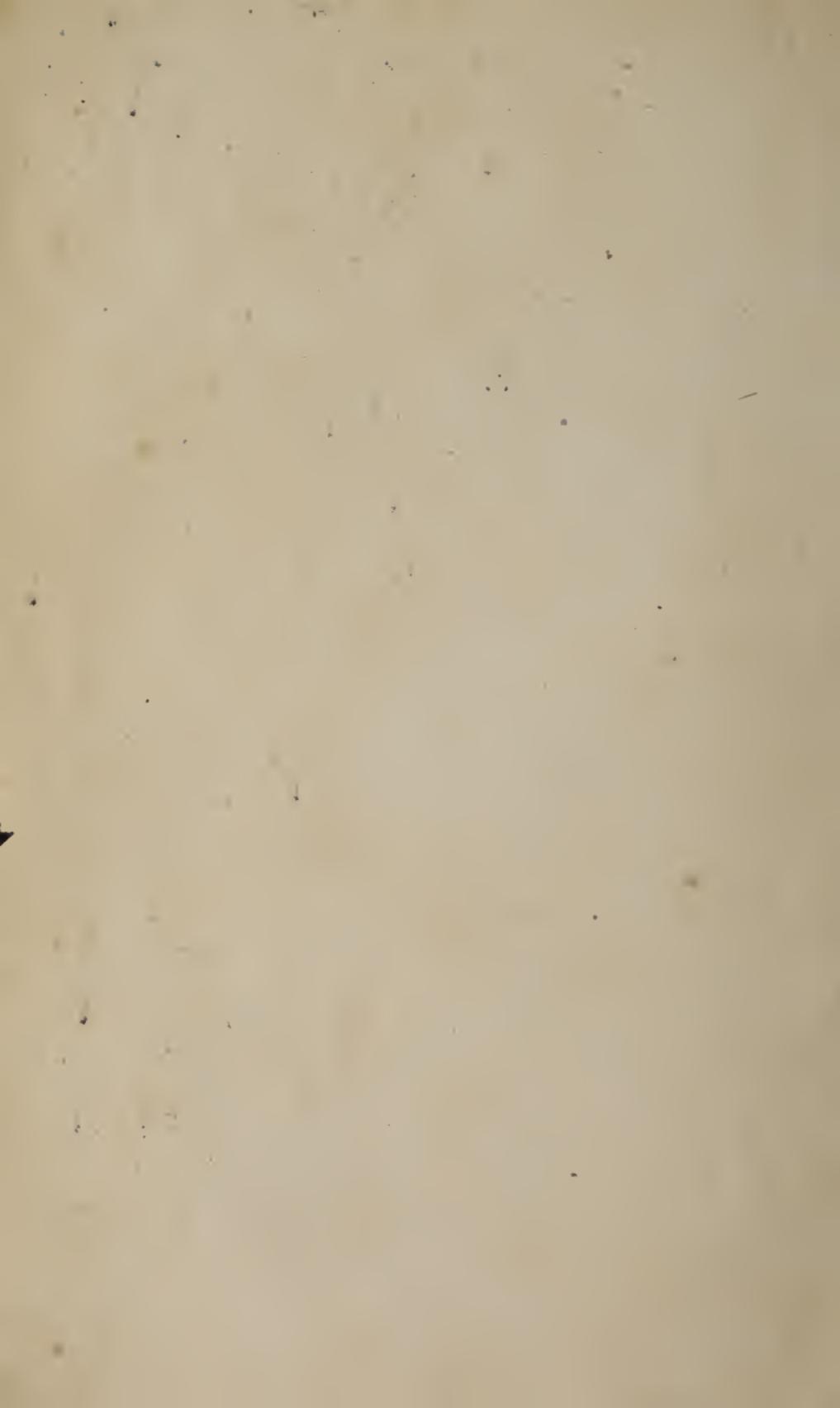
LONDON:
JENNETT, 5, BISHOPSGATE STREET WITHOUT.

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J. J. Rose
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THE HIBERNIAN ESSAY

ON THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

PRINTED FOR
A. W. BENNETT, BISHOPSGATE STREET WITHOUT,
LONDON.

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The following advertisement will sufficiently explain the circumstances under which this Essay was written :—

“ SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

“ PRIZE ESSAY.

“ A GENTLEMAN who laments that, notwithstanding the population of the United Kingdom has more than doubled itself in the last fifty years, the Society of Friends is less in number than at the beginning of the century ; and who believes that the Society at one time bore a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the errors to which it is most prone, and some of the truths which are the most necessary to it ; and that this witness has been gradually becoming more and more feeble, is anxious to obtain light respecting the causes of this change. He offers a prize of one hundred guineas for the best Essay that shall be written on the subject, and a prize of fifty guineas for the one next in merit.

“ He has asked three gentlemen, not members of the Society of Friends, to pronounce judgment on the Essays which shall be sent to them. They have all some acquaintance with the history of the Society, and some interest in its existing members, and as they are likely to regard the subject from different points of view, he trusts that their decision will be impartial ; that they will not expect to find their own opinions represented in the Essays, and that they will choose the one which exhibits the most thought and Christian

earnestness, whether it is favourable or unfavourable to the Society; whether it refers the diminution of its influence to degeneracy,—to something wrong in the original constitution of the body,—to the rules which it has adopted for its government,—or to any extraneous cause.

“ Rev. F. D. Maurice, Chaplain of Lincoln’s Inn ; Professor J. P. Nicholl, Glasgow ; and Rev. E. S. Pryce, Gravesend ; have agreed to act as adjudicators ; to whom the Essays may be sent postage free, to the care of C. S. King, Esq., Messrs. Smith and Elder, Cornhill, on or before 1st October, 1858. Each Essay to be accompanied by a sealed letter containing the name and address of the writer ; the Essay and letter to bear the same motto. The MSS. of the unsuccessful Essays will be returned, on application, with their letters unopened, and successful Essays become the property of the Donor.”

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ESSAY

ON

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

AND THE CAUSES OF ITS DECLENSION.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE PAST AND PRESENT STATE OF THE SOCIETY OF
FRIENDS.

IF we take an expansive review of the great events of the world's history, from the earliest ages of man down to the present time, and then, with a full faith in God's promise, allow the mind's eye to glance forward to that glorious day assuredly coming, "when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas," we cannot but recognise an Omniscient and Omnipotent Hand, controlling those events, and directing them from age to age to the fulfilment of those grand issues, which He in His excellent wisdom conceived "before the mountains were brought forth." Yes; the Great Creator and Designer of all has ever held the reins of human events in His hands; and from the day when our first parents were sent forth from His presence, with all the penalties of their fallen nature attached to them and their posterity, He has ever been mindful of His creature man, and ever carried forward His work according to His inscrutable will. His glorious and beneficent design, that the knowledge of Him should yet spread and cover the

earth, becomes apparent at many prominent points in the history of the past. We see it exhibited in the preservation of Noah, in the separation of Abraham as the progenitor of a chosen people, and in the whole history of the Jews to the coming of His Son, to redeem the world from sin and its consequences, to do away with the forms and ordinances, at first wisely designed for that peculiar people, but now fulfilled in his coming, to teach to the world a pure and perfect morality and to preach to universal man such a religion as man had never yet known,—the ever-blessed and simple truths of Christianity,—to lay down his life for the sins of the world, and to bequeath to us his precious Spirit, “to lead us into all truth.”

And do not the events of General History also meet our view, and so touch on these as to contribute to the great end? We see kingdoms and empires rising into wonderful power and influence: Nineveh and Babylon, Egypt and Assyria, Greece, Rome, and Carthage, spreading their wings far and wide, advancing from the rudeness of barbarism to a high state of civilization, fulfilling each its destiny upon earth and then sinking into obscurity as its purpose was accomplished; but all so worked together that the world was to a wonderful degree prepared for the appearance of the Saviour when his day arrived. The wise men from the East saw his star, and came to worship him in Bethlehem. The Roman Empire was tottering to its fall. The East and the West were prepared for the “stone cut out without hands” which the proud ruler of Babylon saw in his dream, and “which brake in pieces the iron, the brass and the clay,” and which “became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”*

Was the world “filled with the knowledge of the Lord” on the day when Christ Jesus its Saviour commanded his disciples to “go teach and preach in all nations?” No; but a very small part of the world knew *even His name then*. Has it progressed since?

* Dan. ii. 34, 35.

Assuredly it has. The "stone" has, by the power of God, been becoming "a great mountain," but the day is yet far distant when it will "fill the whole earth;" nevertheless that day is certainly approaching.

The followers of and believers in Jesus the Christ were at first a poor, despised, and bitterly persecuted sect, but firm in their hold of the truth they had received, and proving their faith with their lives. Then the great superintending Power inclined the hearts of kings and potentates and nations to receive the knowledge of His Son, and Christianity became a name and took its place amongst the religions of the world. Next followed a long course of ages, during which the pure and simple truths committed by our Lord to his disciples became more and more contaminated and corrupted by priestly influence and various inventions devised by the selfishness or the pride of man. But even in this corrupted state it continued to spread. The conquerors of nations introduced their religion to the conquered people, and a corrupted priesthood, in their lust of power and self-aggrandizement, introduced the blessed name of Christ where it had not ere then been heard. At length God wills that another great onward movement should be made. He has prepared the world to receive it. Luther appears, Bible in hand, telling the nations that the religion of Rome has become impure, defiled, unchristianized. He takes the Book containing the written words and will of God and the history and doctrine of Christ, from the seclusion of the monastic library, hands it to mankind and maintains the glorious truth that it is **THEIRS**. The history of the Reformation is but the account of this great forward movement. Next we have a number of what may be called sub-Reformers, arising out of the spirit of religious freedom evoked by the acts of Luther and his co-workers. We have Whitfield and Knox, and Wesley and Calvin, Fox, Penn and Barclay; the Puritans and the Independents, the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians, the Methodists and the Quakers, each seeing

in its own strong light some particular religious tenet. These had each, doubtless, some wise purposes to fulfil in the great course of events, although we cannot say that any had attained to a perfect apprehension of Christianity, in its full purity and simplicity. Each and all were tinctured, more or less, by the spirit of the age in which they lived.

The mission of the founders of the Society of Friends seems peculiarly to have been, to put still more prominently forward the Spirituality of the Christian Religion. Whilst other sects, or professions, each assumed as its property some particular article of faith, or practised its religion in some, particular form, the Friends (or Quakers, as they were then called in derision), discarding religious observances, endeavoured to place faith and good works in their true relation to each other, asserting that religion was the result of God's work on the soul, by and through His Spirit—that from this influence good could alone spring (Rom. vii. 18), worship could alone be rightly performed (John iv. 23), Ministry alone be true, the Bible alone be properly understood and appreciated (Rom. ii. 11, 12),—in short, salvation be alone accomplished (John iii. 1-21). They considered the institutions of Water Baptism, and the partaking of bread and wine under the name of the Lord's Supper, unnecessary forms; believing true Baptism to be that of the Spirit (Matt. iii. 11), and the Lord's Supper to be the spiritual partaking of his body and blood (John vi. 51-63). They refused on conscientious grounds to partake of these church observances, to pay for the support of a religion opposed to their own, to pander to the vanity of those in power, by addressing them in a flattering manner; and in many other ways firmly, yet quietly, persisted in acting out their own belief of right.

In thus upholding the purity and freedom and spiritual nature of true Christianity, did they not at that time indeed “ bear a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the truths which are most necessary to it ?” For are they not great truths and

necessary to be known for the regeneration of man and for the forwarding of the knowledge of God upon earth, that the life of the soul results from His transforming power thereupon ; that religion is His work, that His Spirit is the source of all good, that His teachings are perceptible by us, and if submitted to and united with, will lead into a true and *saving* knowledge and feeling of *our state*, of the character and offices of Christ our Saviour and of the means of salvation from sin and its consequences, which He has, in infinite mercy and beneficent wisdom, provided for us ?

But besides these more important religious truths, the early Friends preached to the surrounding world, and themselves practised despite much persecution, a stricter and higher and more truly Christian morality than was then known. They upheld the peaceable character of the religion of Christ, literally understood and acted on his command against swearing, refused to countenance or encourage the vain and demoralizing amusements of the age, advocated a plain and simple attire and mode of address and conversation, and strongly insisted on truthfulness at all times and strict justice in all their dealings. They were amongst the first to proclaim the grievous wrong of man holding his fellow-man in bondage and slavery and have by precept and example ever advocated temperance and moderation.

At an early period of their existence as a separate religious society, they arranged for their government an admirable system of Church Discipline, which still continues in full operation amongst them, and which has ever formed a powerful medium of unity amongst themselves and of usefulness abroad wherever they have thought proper to direct their energies.

In the adoption of those religious principles, and in the practice of the morality which appeared to them as their natural result, they firmly believed that they were led and guided by the Holy Spirit of God. And are any prepared to assert, that in thus bearing such a

witness to the world of those great and important truths, in thus condemning the serious errors to which the surrounding world was then, and still is, so prone, they were only led by their own learning or enthusiasm? Can we suppose for a moment that a few men, comparatively ignorant and unenlightened, should appear and proclaim of their own accord, and without Divine assistance, a purer, a more unformal, a simpler, and a more spiritual religion, than had been proclaimed to the world since the earliest days of Christianity? Was it their own pride or stubbornness that enabled them to bear a long and bitter persecution, fines, imprisonment, shame and reproach, even martyrdom itself, in the cause they professed? Nay, rather must we not believe and admit they were sustained through these sore sufferings by the Divine Arm on which they relied for strength; that it was not their own knowledge, wisdom, or invention, that led them to draw together as a people; but that the same Divine Power which had hitherto guided and led forward the world to a larger and wider knowledge of Him, was pleased through them to let in another ray of heavenly light,—a ray whose brightness should not be quenched, even though the medium through which it was at first admitted might in course of time become obscured?

Assuming then that in thus upholding the spiritual nature of the Christian religion they were indeed led by the Great Superintending Power another forward step toward the important end ever in view, it still would not follow that they should rest for ever satisfied, that they should therefore conclude they had attained to the perfection of knowledge, and that the changes ever tending onwards were to cease in them. We cannot assert that such is or has been a principle of their belief; but assuredly any tendency towards such a conclusion would be an error of no small magnitude; and there is ground to apprehend that in a prevalence of some such feeling may be found one remote cause of their present low state.

Previous however to entering on the consideration of those causes, we must endeavour to arrive at a correct estimate of the

state of the Society, not only as to its past and present position, but also as regards its present innate strength.

In looking at the origin and rise of Quakerism we must bear in mind the very extraordinary circumstances, religious and political, which surrounded its birth. The middle of the seventeenth century was marked by one of the most important phases of English history. The monarch then on the throne ere long fell a sacrifice to the spirit of the age ; Feudalism was in its dying throes ; the star of Puritanism was in the ascendant, and reigned paramount for a time. We see a discontented aristocracy and a people struggling for a freedom of which they yet knew not either the nature or the value ; and in the midst of and pervading all this a most excited and earnest element of religious feeling. Society became divided and, when the effervescence subsided, resolved itself into its two strongly-marked constituents. On the one hand, we see the gay licentious cavaliers, and a populace pleasure-seeking, careless of religion, and but too ready to take example by the follies and vices of the Court, and imitate them as they best could : on the other side, we have the deep and earnest Puritan, firm yet enthusiastic in his adherence to his faith, ready and willing to do battle, even to lay down his life, for what he considered the cause of God. Such contending elements could scarcely otherwise than result in bloodshed ; long and bitter was the civil war which ensued, and many were the atrocities committed on both sides. Amongst such scenes and in the midst of feelings such as these, Quakerism spent its early days. A religion of stern self-denial, yet of brotherly fellowship, distinguished by its distrust for and abnegation of the gaieties and vanities of one of the great sections of society at that day, it shows from its earliest date strongly marked characteristics of its relationship to the Puritanic element. But whilst possessing much of the good and of the true contained in that name,—its sincerity, its earnestness, its strong faith,—Quakerism went still farther, or rather say was

led into yet purer paths, by the Spirit from which emanates every good and perfect work. It proclaimed "Peace on earth and goodwill to men." It renounced, on the one hand, the warlike and bitter spirit of the Puritans ; and on the other the vain customs and fashions and amusements of the Court and times of Charles II. To the Puritan it said, "Put up thy sword into its sheath :" to the vain world around, "Come out from amongst them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord ; touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord." (2 Cor. vi. 17.)

In the earlier days of the Society of Friends it indeed was "a poor and despised sect." The few humble individuals who first advocated its principles were subjected to much persecution. Contempt and ridicule were heaped upon them ; but they patiently endured all for the sake of the truth they professed. Despite of legal enactments passed against them, and the enforcement of stringent laws of a former age, they firmly persisted in the endeavour to keep a conscience void of offence toward God, and hesitated not, both in season, and frequently out of season too, to declare both publicly and privately, in preaching and in writing, the truths they had received, and which they believed themselves bound to uphold to the world. Gradually the knowledge of their principles spread and they were accepted by others, and the commencement of the eighteenth century saw meetings of Friends established throughout most parts of the United Kingdom. The peculiar tone of religious feeling in the days of the Protectorate was particularly favourable to the spread of Quakerism. In Ireland, at the present day, the ancestors of many of the oldest and largest families were amongst the settlers who went there at the time of Cromwell's invasion of that country ; and throughout England large numbers can trace their names back to the ranks of the Roundheads. The Pilgrim Fathers, who founded a home on the shores of America, and spread and increased, and became more or less amalgamated with

the surrounding inhabitants, introduced to that then far distant land their self-denying and earnest faith, and although they afterwards proved they had not left in their old home the angry and bitter spirit with which their religion was tinged, yet they contributed largely to swell the numbers of the Friends after a settlement was made there by William Penn, whose name still lives in the title of the great Quaker province of Pennsylvania.

During the eighteenth century the principles of the Society continued to spread, and the records of various meetings show the number of convincements from time to time to have been very considerable. Persecution gradually ceased; many of the laws which worked against them were either modified or repealed; not a few enactments favourable to them were passed; and from that time to the present day each year has seen the people more and more inclined to appreciate and respect them as a religious sect, the Government more and more willing to remove their grievances and recognise their right to perfect liberty of conscience, and to all the other benefits which the truly free and enlightened constitution of Great Britain can grant to any religious community within its borders.

According to the disciplinary rules every child born "in the Society,"—that is, whose parents are both in membership at the time of its birth,—is itself a member, is taken cognizance of by the meeting to which it belongs, and is expected and required to be educated in the principles and according to the habits of the Society.

Might it not then be naturally expected that such a sect, constantly augmented by births within its own borders, and surrounded by a population disposed increasingly to appreciate its claims as a religious body, should go on increasing its numbers largely? And in an age proverbially an inquiring one, in which numbers, dissatisfied with the forms or the absurdities in which they were educated, are anxiously inquiring "What is Truth?" why should

not the principles, which the Friends believe to be the pure and simple truths of Christianity, be laid before seeking minds, and might we not reasonably suppose that convincements would follow in a largely increasing ratio? But what is the fact? Speaking for the United Kingdom only* (for the subject of our inquiry does not extend further), we apprehend, that during the last half-century, the Society, so far from adding to itself even in the same increasing ratio as the rest of the population, *has considerably decreased in numbers.*

In the absence of any general statistical account,—none such being kept by the Society,—we are compelled to deduce our conclusions as to its numerical strength from such other means as are within our reach. The best means then afforded us is by ascertaining whether all the meetings once established are still kept up, and whether the numbers belonging to them are as large as formerly. If not, whether the discontinuance is consequent on the decrease of numbers, and whether such decrease can be accounted for by a corresponding augmentation in any other meetings. We find that throughout the kingdom many meetings have been altogether discontinued; that in many places where they are still held the numbers are greatly reduced; and that, although in a few of the larger meetings a considerable increase has taken place, almost entirely by the removal of Friends to reside there, yet that even this is by no means equal to the diminution throughout the country.† We are thus safely warranted in the conclusion that a considerable

* It has been stated, and we believe truly, that the Society is on the increase in America. The cause of this difference may be an interesting subject of inquiry; but it is not our present business. The circumstances of social life are widely different in the two countries, and good reasons could easily be shown for the different results.

† The number of Friends who have emigrated either to America or Australia during the past half-century is comparatively very small, and would not by any means account for the deficiency.

decrease has occurred. The number now united to the Society by convincement is exceedingly small.

But our review of the present state would be very incomplete indeed did we only glance at their comparative Numbers. The important question remains as to their Internal Vitality. Are the simple truths of Christianity which were introduced and upheld by Fox, Penn and Barclay, as strong and as flourishing principles of mind and of action as they were in the early days of Quakerism? Have these principles been thoroughly understood and carried out during the past half or the past whole century? Do the Friends now bear the powerful witness to the world that they once did concerning many of its errors, and do they still cease not to teach and to preach the truths they received? Is their light becoming feeble? —has its brightness indeed become dull? To answer these inquiries, to see how far the gold has become dim, and to discover and unfold the causes of the change, is the next subject for our consideration.

To enable us to form an impartial judgment of the comparative brightness of the light which the early Friends believed themselves called upon “to let shine before men,” and that now held up to the world by them, we must again call to mind the wide difference which exists between the religious and moral tone of society in that day and at the present time. Behold, on the one hand, the intrigues and the exactions of the Court and Government of the unfortunate Charles I.; the zealous plottings of Cromwell and his compatriots to overturn the enemies and the systems opposed to their ideas of right; the licentious gaieties of the days of Charles II.; and compare the circumstances of those times with the vastly advanced and still advancing state of things during the long reign of good old King George; and even though perfection was far from being reached, either then or during the regency and succeeding reign, yet there has been a powerful tendency during the present century towards a more healthy action of the “higher powers;” and from the commencement of the reign of our present sincerely and deservedly beloved

Sovereign, we hesitate not to assert that we have not hitherto known in any Court such an example of high and true and earnest moral and religious feeling, united to domestic virtues of the highest order, and a liberality and beneficence of thought and of action which entitle our thus endeared Queen Victoria to the love and the admiration of every mind capable of appreciating the good, the true and the beautiful. And is it not well known that the masses take the lead from those above them? Certainly, the state of general society at those times formed no exception to this rule. Society plunged in civil war, with all its horrors and atrocities, or even just recovering from its debasing effects, is a very unhealthy soil indeed for the existence or growth of a pure Christianity. As one instance, let us revert for a moment to the state of our metropolis at that day. Look at the narrow and ill-paved and unlighted streets reeking with filth, of which the spreading of the great Plague was, in no small degree, the consequence, and for the removal of which the great Fire was a blessing. Look at the insecurity for life and property. See the citizen of London guarded to his home at night by his apprentices with torch in one hand and bludgeon in the other, and his own "trusty rapier" by his side. See his wife and his daughters exposed to the unbridled licentiousness of a corrupt aristocracy; himself threatened with the secret terrors of the Star Chamber.

Any one read in English history cannot but see the comparative darkness of that time. Where were then the institutions which now exist for the progress or the happiness of the people—for the education of the young, for the reformation of the criminal or the drunkard, for the care and recovery of the lunatic, for the freedom of the slave, for the cultivation of the arts, for the advancement of science, or for the many other objects for which good and true men in these days combine their energies, whether such objects be religious, moral, or political, or appertaining to the spread of intelligence or taste? It, indeed, needs

no extraordinary stretch of intellect to see that the present is an age of enlightenment compared with the early days of the Society of Friends. Supposing, then, the Christian truths advocated at first by them to be now upheld with equal earnestness and sincerity, would they appear in as strong relief as they did against the darker background of the past? Would their light burn so brightly now in the opening dawn of a better day as it did in the deep shadows which surrounded its first appearance? Naturally we admit it would not appear so, even supposing the light to have burned all the time with equal brightness. Therefore we must not conclude that its present apparent feebleness is altogether as great as would at first sight appear to be the case. Further, we see that not a few of the peculiar ideas of their early days are now no longer peculiar to them, having been, in the course of an advancing tide of knowledge and Christian feeling, accepted and adopted, more or less, by the good and the true of many other sects. The advocacy of the cause of the slave, of the undeniable right of liberty of conscience, of the wrong of enforcing the payment of tithes, is now no longer left to them alone. The good sense and good taste of avoiding a vain and superfluous style of dress, the disuse of insincere and flattering language, and the denial of participation in amusements of a hurtful or debasing character, are no longer the peculiarities of a sect, but some amongst the healthy moral principles which an improved state of society has confirmed and which now govern the acts of well-thinking and sensible people throughout the kingdom. And although as much cannot be said for the spread of their Religious Principles, yet we apprehend that their great fundamental doctrine of the Spirituality of the Kingdom of Christ, and of the necessity of the Influence of His Spirit to lead into the path of salvation, is, almost unconsciously to the world, becoming more and more felt to be amongst the realities of religion.

If then it be true, as we have endeavoured to show, that Quakerism did at first take a considerable stride in advance, yet if

it then stood still, whilst surrounding society gradually came up with it, can we wonder that it does not *now* stand as prominently forward as it *then* did? But, after making all due allowance for the improved state of society at the present day, the questions still remain, Have they really stood still and firmly held the ground they once occupied; have they advanced and gone on from strength to strength; or have they retrograded? Is their light becoming dim; has their witness to the truth become feeble? Whilst willing to do them full justice on the one side, yet impartiality compels us to acknowledge on the other that the evidence of their retrogression, in many ways, is too strong to admit of any doubt.

First, then, let us look at the present state of the Ministry amongst them. In numberless meetings silence reigns from one end of the year to the other, except when broken by a visit from an occasional travelling minister. Whilst we do not here enter into the question whether true worship cannot be performed without the interposition of a preacher, yet we hesitate not to assert that the want of a plentiful supply of earnest and powerful Gospel ministers was neither felt by the earlier Friends, nor can we believe they ever contemplated such a falling off. Then it is not only in this want that we see an evidence of weakness, but in the *quality* or *force* of the *ministry itself*. Read some of the fine, sound, earnest old sermons, still preserved in print, of the worthy pioneers of the cause—George Fox and Stephen Crisp and William Penn, and many others. And even where we have not the whole sermons, read in the journals of many of the early Friends what “they felt called upon to testify unto the people;” see the powerful convictions they produced, and the convincements and adhesion to the cause which followed *such a ministry*. And compare these with the *effusions* which many of the “acknowledged ministers” now indulge in. From thus pronouncing what we believe to be the present painful reality, it is a pleasing relief to turn to the brighter side, and freely to admit that

there still are amongst them, as there have ever been, a few noble and earnest servants of Christ, who themselves set free and made strong by his precious Spirit, are true ministers of his word, instruments of power and of blessed usefulness in his hand, to the awakening of many slumbering souls and to the bringing home the Bread of Life to many who have been “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” But whilst we rejoice in thus testifying to the presence of a living and true ministry still amongst them, the numbers of these are so few that their presence cannot be considered an evidence of increased strength in the body at large.

The comparative weakness of later times is further seen in the flatness and dulness of their meetings for Worship ; so widely different indeed from those we read of, held in the midst of opposition and difficulties, when the love of Christ flowed as a tide amongst them and souls were refreshed and comforted by the very *communicableness* of the vivid religious feeling which then prevailed.

Again, look at the *working out and carrying forward* of their excellent and admirable system of Discipline. Instead of a full attendance of their Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, and of a lively interest being felt and manifested by all for the healthy maintenance of their little church, these affairs are, in many localities, left entirely to the management of a few, who endeavour to get through the usual routine in the manner most agreeable and easy to themselves, and least likely to disturb the harmony of their quiet and peaceable habits.

And with regard to their cherished “Peculiarities” of Dress and of Language, we are not quite clear they have adhered to *first principles*. Has not the *spirit* of the principle been too much sacrificed to the *form*? However that may be there is certainly great diversity, both of opinion and of practice, now amongst them in these respects. Other circumstances of their state during the past fifty years might be mentioned, if needful ; but we consider enough has now been said to shew that the Society has lost no

inconsiderable share of its original vigour and strength ; that its light has indeed become dim ; that it has retrograded rather than advanced with the ever-flowing current ; and that without some radical change for the better it is not likely to exercise that influence to which its principles would undoubtedly lead, did its members more clearly understand and more faithfully act upon the duties prescribed to them by their profession.

A review of their present state would however be incomplete, did we omit to mention that cheering indications have been exhibited during the past few years of the possibility of such a change. An increased degree of interest in the cause appears, in many places, amongst the younger members. The system of education has received a large amount of attention and is getting more and more on a satisfactory basis. The formal habits into which some principles, however excellent in themselves, have gradually degenerated, have been questioned, and their useless, if not positively hurtful, tendency pointed out. There is an increasing disposition to discover and amend the causes of their weakness. In short, the Friends have begun to find fault with themselves ; and it has been wisely said "that when we find out our faults and set about repairing them, we are on the surest road to improvement ;" for so long as we rest satisfied with a contented self-complacency, and nourish in secret our pride or our exclusiveness, we have but little chance of ever seeing our real state, and are very unlikely indeed to make any progress towards a more healthy state of things.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CAUSES OF THEIR DEGENERACY AND DECLENSION.

WE believe that, on an impartial examination, it will be found that the declension in numbers of the Society of Friends in the United Kingdom is not attributable to any one reason in particular, but is rather the result of several causes, arising in part from their degeneracy, in part from imperfection in their original constitution, and in part from external circumstances.

It appears to us a fundamental error to suppose, that as a consequence of any one being moved or impelled by the Influence of the Spirit of God on their minds to the performance of what is right and good, it must necessarily follow that all the acts of individuals whose feelings are thus aroused must therefore be infallible and perfect. We have abundant evidence to the contrary in the Holy Scriptures, in the records of the history of good men in all ages, and indeed in the early writings of the very Society whose cause we are now discussing. The sun ever shines in all its intensity and purity, although the intervening clouds may obscure its brightness. The medium through which its light reaches us is more or less obscure or imperfect. And just as reasonable would it be in us to doubt the existence of the sun when his rays are so obscured, or to suppose that whenever he shines his beams must fall in their full and entire intensity, as to conclude that the result of such Influence is immediate and invariable perfection. No : for wise purposes the Great Dispenser of all has placed the clouds and the atmosphere between us and Him ; and doubtless it is in unerring wisdom also that it pleases Him to advance his work amongst men through the medium

of imperfect man himself. One bright, pure, perfect ray, the world has indeed beheld, unclouded by human weakness, uncontaminated by sin; even Jesus, the Saviour of man, the Lamb of God without blemish and without spot. The Scriptures of Truth were written by holy men who “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” and these blessed writings we must also accept in their *full* integrity. And yet we see instances in the lives of many of these good men where weakness and imperfection were exhibited. In the Acts of the Apostles after the ascension of our Lord, and in the Epistles to the early Christian Churches, we see that although strong both in faith and good works, yet in many cases they had to be taken to task for errors retained or fallen into. In the lives of those noble martyrs and servants of Christ, the ancient fathers of the Church, many of whom were the instruments of conveying his blessed name throughout the old world, we still see the clouds of human weakness through which the knowledge of the Sun of Righteousness reached our forefathers. Pass on to the time of the dauntless Luther and the gentle Melanthon and the host of reformers who then appeared, and where do we find an absolute perfection of character, notwithstanding that these good men were doubtless led and impelled by the influence of Divine Grace on their minds to be what they were, and to come thus boldly forward as shining lights in their day, to declare his name and his truth to the dark world around?

And do the Friends mean to claim for their founders an exemption from the laws to which human nature has been subject in all ages? Can they conclude that, because they were led into a still clearer perception of the truths of religion, into the adoption of principles higher or purer than others, and into the practice of a morality better than their neighbours, they had attained the sum and substance of all perfection?—that their doctrines were incapable of further elucidation, and their moral code unsurpassable in its

excellence, and suited to the circumstances and requirements of all ages to come? And although we are not aware that any such belief has been recognised by the Society, either in its principles or by its writings, yet there is ground for an apprehension that many amongst them have entertained some such feeling; and doubtless wherever it exists it must inevitably form a dangerous impediment to progress.

Assuming then the possibility of imperfection in their original constitution, we shall proceed to consider, whether at the time of their being called into the possession of purer gold than any they had yet known, they retained with it any of the dross.

Look at the past history of any religion, and we shall see it more or less tinctured at its rise with some of the peculiar conditions of the state of society out of which it sprang. Peter hesitated to convey the blessings of the gospel to the Gentiles* until he was warned, in a special vision, that what God had cleansed he should not call common or unclean. The Hebrew Christians had to be warned by Paul† against the continuance of their accustomed formalities and dependence on their laws and sacrifices, and exhorted to the law of faith in Christ: the Romans‡ against doubtful disputations and pride in their calling and election: the Corinthians against the dissensions§ and scholastic disputes of the worldly-wise Greek of that day. And the seven Churches of Asia,|| by John the beloved disciple, were each plainly, though beautifully and tenderly, dealt with for faults they had committed or errors they had retained or crept into, even at that early period of their existence. But our time and space would fail us thus to run through the events of Church history. Did the stalwart pioneer of Protestantism himself come off quite clear of the slime out of

* Acts x. 28. † Hebrews ii.-xi.

‡ Romans xiv. 1; xi. 1-36.

§ 1 Cor. iii. 18-20; ii. 1-16; i. 17-31.

|| Rev. i. 5 to iii. 22.

which he struggled? And is it to be disputed that Quakerism unconsciously retained some small portion of the unhealthy elements existing in the Puritanism from the midst of which it took its rise? We believe that such was the case, and shall endeavour to show that in this retention may be found one source of errors in their original constitution. But as the errors which may be referred more directly to this cause come under the head of Moral arrangements and practices, we shall leave them for after-consideration, and first proceed to see whether any imperfection existed in the Religious Principles set forth by them.

This is a question which we might very naturally expect to find answered by every one according to his own particular faith. Any man "fully persuaded in his own mind," of course thinks his own conclusions the best; and we cannot, therefore, look for such a definite reply as will satisfy the many and various apprehensions of Christian truth which prevail in the present day, and which will undoubtedly continue long hence, and only come to be blended into one pure and perfect faith according as the full knowledge of the Lord shall advance in the world.

But we are quite willing to meet the Friends upon their own ground, and to grant them all they can reasonably require. We have before not only admitted, but endeavoured to shew, that they were indeed called forth by the Divine Power, in the midst of comparative darkness, to bear to the world a witness to brighter and purer truths, and to a "more perfect way," than it had yet known. Granting, therefore, the correctness of their Religious Principles, we look for any element of imperfection in the want of a *full and clear* reception of these Truths *by themselves*, and in the misconceptions which might arise from any failure in their setting them forth with *entire clearness* to the world. Far be it from us to call in question the lives or the conduct of those truly good and pious and zealous servants of God. But they were MEN; and if we see in their

writings or teachings anything referable to the inherent weakness of man, we must conclude, that however largely redeemed from the spirit of the world, yet they were still subject to like passions as we are, and so expect that the light transmitted through them to us would be tinged by their imperfections.

To enter, then, more fully into particulars, we would ask, in the first place, have they themselves fully understood and set forth the nature and extent of the Spiritual guidance which, after all, forms the basis of their superstructure, and at the time of their foundation was their great distinguishing tenet? We believe it will be found that WANT OF CLEARNESS on this important point has ever left them open to an undue influence from a fervid or excited imagination on the one hand, and from the leadings of an unenlightened human conscience on the other. It will naturally be objected by them that there can be no want of clearness here; and they will insist that all their writings, from their rise to the present day, teem with allusions to this great principle, and fully explain its efficacy. Doubtless they are full of the subject; and we further grant them that not only those writings, but the acts and the lives of their authors, and of many others amongst them but incidentally known to the world, and no doubt of thousands known only in their own individual circle of private life, exhibit the most undeniable evidence that they were indeed both right and clear *in their own minds*; that, belonging to the fold of the True Shepherd, "they knew his voice from the voice of a stranger."* But it is one thing to *feel* and another to *understand*; one thing to be *ourselves* conscious, another to explain and set *before others* the nature of that consciousness. We are far from supposing, that to experience in ourselves the blessed effects of this Divine influence on the heart, it is by any means *needful* we should either understand or be able to explain its precise nature. And we fully admit that looking for knowledge instead of submitting to the feeling may be most injurious

* John x. 1-18.

to the *individual mind*. But on the other hand, when we come to set forth any truth *before others*, it is to their understandings or sense we have to address ourselves. They read with their eyes, or they hear with their ears, and they reflect upon what they see and hear, and compare, and inquire, and recollect, and combine ideas in the mind, and the truth of a principle becomes thus seen and received where the manner in which it is stated is such as to induce its reception. If it were otherwise, where would be the use of even writing or printing, or setting forth in any way, our own faith or our own ideas for the participation of others? True, an address to the heart (as it is called) may arouse *feelings*, or excite good sensations; but it is through the rightly-disposed understanding we receive the innate conviction that truth *is* truth. Again, we admit that, in the unsearchable wisdom of Him who thus led his servants from age to age, it may have been his design, whilst largely endowing them with the feelings, not to grant them any further or clearer understanding on the subject. We have already shown that the unfoldings of His knowledge to the world are very gradual, and only as the world is prepared to receive it; and we are far indeed from raising a question on the perfect wisdom exhibited in His design of extending thus much and no further in that day to those who, themselves strongly feeling the blessed effects of his Spirit, endeavoured, as far as lay in their power, to set it before others. On the contrary, we consider it affords another convincing proof of great and admirable wisdom when we for a moment consider how unwilling the surrounding world was then, and even long after, to receive the intimation of the very existence of such an Influence.

But the admission of all this does not, we conceive, in the least overturn our original position—that there was a *want of clearness* on this point, not only in the Friends' own conception of it, but more particularly in their writings. Let us take, for instance, their standard work—“Barclay's Apology;” or, as the title-page has it, “An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: being an Explan-

tion and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People called Quakers. Written in Latin and English by Robert Barclay, and since translated into High Dutch, Low Dutch, French and Spanish, for the Information of Strangers.” That from which we now quote is the “eighth edition in English, published A.D. 1780.” It was written in 1675. (In fifteen propositions.)

His first proposition is to the effect that the true knowledge of God is that which is most necessary to be known and believed in the first place. With this we can have no fault to find, except that the terms in which he states it, appear at first sight to want simplicity and clearness. The second declares “that the testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which this knowledge is attainable; that these Divine inward revelations neither do nor can ever contradict the Scriptures or right or sound reason;” yet that “from thence it will not follow that they are to be subjected to the examination either of the Scriptures or of the natural reason of man, as to a more noble or certain rule or touchstone; for this Divine revelation or inward illumination is that which is evident and clear of itself, forcing by its own evidence and clearness the well-disposed understanding to assent, irresistibly moving the same thereunto,” &c. &c.

Now, all this may possibly appear clear enough to those who can understand it; but we cannot say it is likely to be *very convincing* to ordinary minds. The “revelations,” we are told, *cannot contradict* the Scriptures or reason, yet they *are not to be tested* by either; they are to *force* the understanding to *assent*, and so forth. Is not this very like “reasoning in a circle?” Is it a sound and *clear* exposition of a Fundamental Principle?

Now let us hear what our “Apologist” has to say on other important matters. His seventh proposition “on Justification” runs thus: “As many as resist not this light, but receive the same, in them is produced a holy, pure, and spiritual birth, bringing forth holiness, righteousness, purity, and all these other

blessed fruits which are acceptable to God: by which holy birth (to wit, Jesus Christ formed within us, and working his works in us,) as we are sanctified so are we justified in the sight of God, according to the apostle's words,—‘ But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God !’ Therefore, it is not by our works wrought in our will, nor yet by good works, considered as of themselves, but by Christ, who is both the gift and the giver, and the cause producing the effects in us; who, as he hath reconciled us while we were enemies, doth also in his wisdom save us, and justify us in this manner; as saith the same apostle elsewhere,—‘ According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.’”

We are not going to join issue with the Friends as to the soundness of this principle; we have stated we would grant them their own ground; but we ask any one *is it clear?* is this such an explanation of such an important Christian tenet as may satisfy a seeking mind? Is it comprehensive? Does it betray clearness on the subject in the writer himself, more particularly as he nowhere else alludes to the subject of Sanctification, so we may take this proposition to include both these subjects. Now pass we on to the next (8th) proposition—“Concerning Perfection.” “In whom this holy and pure birth is fully brought forth, the body of death and sin comes to be crucified and removed, and their hearts united and subjected unto the truth, so as not to obey any suggestion or temptation of the evil one, but to be free from actual sinning and transgressing of the law of God, and in that respect perfect. Yet does this perfection still admit of a growth; and there remaineth a possibility of sinning where the mind doth not most diligently and watchfully attend unto the Lord.” It appears to us that the term Perfection has here been misplaced. We do not suppose anything perfect or complete which could admit of a growth in perfection or completeness. It would be neither one nor

the other if it was less than the term implies. But the misplacing of the term was, we think, a grave error, and has led to serious consequences.

Time would fail us to go through the whole of the fifteen propositions, but perhaps enough has been mentioned for our purpose. There is much that is good and admirable in this remarkable work, and instances have been adduced of convincement of the principles having succeeded its perusal ; but we think it cannot be denied that its pages contain much that is difficult to be understood, and that, to ordinary minds, it is by no means "*a clear explanation*" as its title imports, of the "True Christian Divinity."

Abundant instances might be brought forward from other writings of the early Friends, of this same want of clearness, both as to their own want of fully apprehending their principles, and their inability to set them convincingly forth for the information of others. Our space is, however, limited, and we shall not therefore unprofitably fill our pages with what can be so easily pointed out should its correctness be questioned.

In a Society dependent for its support and increase on either convincement or birthright, it would appear particularly needful for its strength that parents should themselves clearly understand, so as to be able to instruct their children, and that the principles should be set clearly before others, so as to become convincing. And although many circumstances conspired to form the Society, and add to its numbers during its first century, yet we cannot but conclude that the want of clear instruction of the young thus arising, each succeeding age thence becoming weaker than the last, has been one important cause of the internal degeneracy which is the subject of our inquiry.

We have before adverted to the present state of the Ministry amongst the Friends. It now remains for us to see if we can point out any cause for this decided symptom of degeneracy. It is important for us to do so, as it is not only a *symptom*, but a

consequence of something wrong ; and becomes again a serious cause of further weakness. The decline in their number of ministers may, we believe, be assigned to three principal causes. Firstly, want of submission to the inciting power of God in their own minds ; secondly, to timidity of thus coming publicly forward (which timidity may be referred to several reasons) ; and, thirdly, to a fear that if they do so, it will take so much time and attention from their worldly callings that themselves and their families may get into pecuniary difficulties. We must take such reasons at their just value. The first bespeaks want of vigour in the religious mind ;—the second, ungodly fear, want of the true Christian courage that clear conviction and heartfelt zeal for the cause of God should confer ;—the third shews an absence of confidence in the superintending care of God to provide all things needful for those who are engaged in his work. And yet we doubt if the Friends have been wise in their arrangement of laying on their ministers the whole burden of trade, with all its harassing cares and anxieties. Christ himself told the ministers of his mission when he sent them forth,* “to take neither purse nor scrip, for the labourer was worthy of his meat ;” and the apostle Paul† expressly lays down that the minister should be supported by the Church, and although he himself abstained (whilst at Corinth for a time under peculiar circumstances) from demanding this right, yet he afterwards states‡ “that he took wages of other Churches, to do them service, and to avoid being burdensome to them.”

The Friends support and pay all the charges of their “approved ministers,” whilst travelling about from place to place “in the love of the gospel ;” but they do not in such cases take into any consideration whatever the requirements of the preacher’s business, or his domestic expenses ; and the local minister who does not travel is left entirely to his own resources to make out a livelihood for himself and family. We think they would do well seriously to

* Mark vi. 8 ; Luke x. 4.

† 1 Cor. ix. 7-14.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 7-9.

re-consider these arrangements. In any case, we believe it has operated as one cause tending to reduce the number of ministers amongst them.

With regard to the second reason assigned,—that of timidity,—it appears to arise partly from the natural hesitation most people feel thus suddenly to attract public attention to themselves. They fear they may not speak well, or may break down, or that they may not be “good enough” to undertake so responsible an office. But besides these minor difficulties, which may soon be got over, is the more important one of not “being approved” when they do surmount them and commence to preach in their meetings. The “Elders,” who are selected by the subordinate meetings, and confirmed in their office by a superior meeting, are the appointed judges, in the first instance, of the worth or value of the ministry of those who may thus come publicly forward. It is their particular duty to dissuade from any preaching which may appear to them not to bear the right stamp, and to afford all due encouragement to any which they consider of sterling value. It will thus be seen what a responsibility rests upon this particular body, and how much depends upon the clearness and correctness of their judgment. And although on their approving of a minister, such approval must be confirmed both by the inferior and superior meetings, yet instances are seldom, if ever, known of their judgment being reversed. It therefore mainly depends upon them, and if they discourage or put down any who might afterwards become true and useful preachers of the Word, they do a direct injury, not only by depriving the Society of the benefit of such service, but in a tenfold degree, by the discouragement it gives to others who might feel so inclined. The injury in such case to the individual immediately concerned cannot be calculated. And on the other hand, if they approve of and bring forward any whose preaching subsequently proves unworthy so high a profession, see how the whole tone or character of their “approved ministry” may be lowered thereby.

Now, whilst we can feel how difficult a duty rests upon them, and desire to be far from censorious, yet, judging by results, and seeing the character of much of the ministry of the present day, we are unavoidably compelled to the conclusion that the Elders have not proved fully equal to their responsible task, and that the arrangements as to the selection of their ministers or elders are in some way in want of improvement. We most fully admit that all these fears and reasonings in the minds of those who believe themselves called to the Ministry may and should be overcome by the love and the fear of their Divine Master; and that a full confidence in His protecting power may, perhaps, be but confirmed by having to pass through these trials of their faith and their strength. But does it not still remain true, that these things are, and have been, serious discouragements to many who, under better arrangements, would be well qualified to engage in this great and useful work?

The way in which PUBLIC WORSHIP is observed in any religious sect not only affords evidence of its state, but contributes in a very high degree to its present and future strength or weakness. We have already stated that in numerous places the Meetings for Worship held by Friends are *totally silent*. We cannot here enter as fully as we should wish into the consideration of this deeply important subject. We entirely agree with them that all True Worship consists in the communion of the immortal spirit of man with his great Creator; that “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” And that this privileged state may be enjoyed in silence we fully admit. But that silent worship is the *best mode* of *public* worship is quite another question. Is not this communion of spirit induced and encouraged and enlivened by a true ministry, by vocal prayer? Do not the imparting and the receiving of exhortation, and of instruction in the things of God, or of encouragement in the way of salvation, form a part of the duty of Public Worship?—and is not the united exercise

* John iv. 23, 24.

of His praise, and of solemn and sincere prayer to Him, involved in its requirements and to be counted amongst its benefits ? We cannot think that Public Worship thus held in silence bespeaks a healthy state of things, or is conducive to an increase of strength. In the present day it is well known, that in many localities where no ministry exists amongst them, many of their members, more particularly the younger ones, who, attached to the Society and desirous of retaining their membership, attend their silent meetings on the morning of the Sabbath, proceed in the afternoon to the congregation of the local preacher. Such facts speak loudly for themselves. Do we need to look for a cause of degeneracy whilst such things exist ? Debarred from such instruction at home, they seek it elsewhere, of those very willing to give it ; and is it to be wondered at if their attachment to their own profession is thus weakened, and a new love aroused in their minds ? How different, how widely different, was it in the early days of the Society ! And although a living ministry still exists, yet how small is its supply ! "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few." We cannot avoid the conclusion that according as, from age to age, the supply of sound Gospel Ministry, from whatever cause, became gradually less, the increasing want was followed by increasing weakness, inducing poverty of feeling in their Meetings for Public Worship, thus involving *another* important cause of their religious degeneracy.

We have before stated, amongst other peculiar religious tenets held by the Society of Friends, their belief that the observances of Water Baptism, and the partaking of the bread and wine, under the name of the Lord's Supper, are institutions not required by the Christian dispensation, nor commanded them by the Holy Scriptures. We also see that they object to the use of *set forms* of Prayer, either in public or private. Relinquishing thus, as they do, *outward Religious Observances* of almost every kind, it follows that if the life and light of religion exists not in their hearts, inducing in them the

purest of all faith, and that practical excellence of character and conduct which would appear as the “fruits of the Spirit;” if they have not this, they possess neither the Form nor the Power, and may be said, perhaps even more than others, to live “without God in the world.” How very important must it be therefore, to the members of a sect professing such high and spiritual principles, to be Individually alive to their state, to their responsibilities, and to their duties. It would be supposing their original constitution perfect to say that absolute perfection of life and conduct would follow Individual Faithfulness to their profession ; but, however this may be, we are quite clear that in the want of a true and sincere desire to know, and duly to feel, the importance of their great principle,—that of the teaching and guidance of the Spirit of Truth,—in the non-encouragement of the feelings prompted by this Spirit in their minds, (which, if followed, would, as Christ himself declared, “lead into all truth,”) and in the consequent failure of such inestimably valuable experience ; may perhaps be found, after all, *the chief and most important CAUSE* of their gradual retrogression, and their present weakened state.

How important, again, is Individual Influence, for good or for evil ! “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”—“The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

What a glorious state it is to be redeemed from the spirit of the world by the Spirit of Christ ; to walk with Him, feeling that through Him we have been born into a new life, and become the sons and daughters of God, and heirs of salvation : to be made free from the laws of sin and death ; to feel, and to rejoice, and to “stand fast in the glorious liberty wherewith Christ has made us free ;”—then, indeed, has the world lost for us its sinful charms and its weakening fears ; our love to the Beneficent One is to us the first and most precious commandment of all ; our love to our fellow-man is ever alive, and blossoms in ardent desires and untiring exertions for his good

and his happiness ; self is of no account ; Christ becomes all in all ; death has lost its sting, the grave its victory ; and we look forward with a blessed hope to an eternity of bliss, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,” and which God has promised to those that love him.

And if such are the results of the work of the Grace of God, how important does it appear that the *earliest intimation* of His Spirit should be carefully heeded and encouraged. It is this which awakens the first living, secret, sincere DESIRE *after God* ; and whatever external causes may have tended to induce such a feeling, or under whatever circumstances it may have become apparent ; whether it be in the storm, or in the calm ; in the enjoyment of life, or in the prospect of eternity ; whether in the midst of pleasure, or under the pressure of affliction ; let us at that moment feel that we have “found the pearl of great price,”* and grasp it carefully, and guard it tenderly, and be willing to sell all that we have that we may retain its possession ; for it is indeed the seed † of the kingdom of God, which Christ declared was at first the smalleſt of all seeds, but which, when it was grown, became a great tree, so that the birds of the air came and lodged under its branches. This is the first appearance of the Spirit of Truth, which would in God’s own way and time lead unto all truth, if allowed so to grow and have its due influence. It is this which inclines the heart to God ; which purifies the affections, and enlightens the conscience ; shines upon the understanding, and elevates the reason ; leads us to see our sinful state, and to feel the need of a Saviour ; creates within us a true and living Faith, and enables us to look hopefully forward to a happy immortality. It is what the great apostle has so comprehensively termed “the grace of God, which bringeth salvation,”‡ But to produce these blessed effects, its operations must be unbiased by prejudice, uncontaminated by pride or selfishness, undisturbed by

* Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

† Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

‡ Titus ii. 11, 12.

fearfulness. We must receive it as “a little child,” and go on from strength to strength ; until, from babes in Christ, “nourished with the sincere milk of the Word,” we come to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might ; valiant for His cause in the earth, faithfully filling our allotted stations, whatever these may be ; and by our example and conversation amongst men, if not in any more conspicuous way, thus doing our part towards spreading His true knowledge abroad in the world.

But, however deeply interesting these truths may be, we must not now dwell much longer on them, and therefore revert to the more immediate subject of our inquiry. The duty of Individual Faithfulness to the manifestations of the Spirit in the heart was what we had before us ; and we may again repeat our conclusion, that, had this faithfulness been preserved in the degree it existed in the early days of the Society, so far from a retrogression having taken place, there would have been an advancement in all that was truly and purely good ; that any clouds or dimness which may have overhung their first appearance, would in due time have gradually cleared away ; that their light would have indeed shone before men, to the glory of the Great Head of the Church, and to the convincing and converting of precious souls throughout the world from the powers of darkness, and from the fetters of sin, to the “glorious liberty of the children of God.”

We next proceed to the consideration of the Moral Habits and Practices of the Society of Friends, and to see whether anything in these can in any way have tended either to religious degeneracy or to the declension of their numbers.

It is ever an ungracious task to oppose a cherished error ; to unveil a secret canker ; to stir up the still water, and find it muddy underneath ; to bring to the light a hidden treasure, and find it mouldered away, and covered with dust and rubbish. But the days are come when the truth must be looked

at "straight in the face," and nothing but sterling coin be allowed to pass.

Much do we admire the high moral character of the Society. Justly have they gained it, and justly do they still hold it. Their love of truth speaking and justice in dealing, their brotherly kindness towards each other, the mild but sincere courtesy which marks their intercourse with others, their care of their own poor, their attention to the education of their youth, the order and regularity of their internal and domestic arrangements, and the general correctness and uprightness of their walk amongst their fellow-men, have justly gained them the respect and esteem of those with whom they are brought into connexion. Yet we must confess that there is much remaining under this head; many things to be found amongst what are called "the peculiarities" of this sect, that have proved far from beneficial to the growth of religious life amongst them, and decidedly preventive to the spreading of their principles.

The "Peculiarities" most apparent to the world, are those of language, deportment, and dress, or, as they themselves term them, "speech, behaviour, and apparel."

We see in the history of almost all religious societies, that there exists a tendency, sooner or later, to fall into the *form*, to the neglect of the *substance*.

If the ideas of the Friends upon these subjects did really, as they profess to do, arise from, and were required by, the law of Christ, then, if the world chose not to accept them, the fault would not be theirs, but the world's; but on the other hand, if we have grounds to apprehend that they have somewhat overstrained the requirements of true religion in these respects; that in falling into the form, the original principle has not been sufficiently kept in view; that they have cultivated the "hedge" to the injury of the precious flowers within, and to the growth, in their place, of the unhealthy weeds of pride and exclusiveness, (which ever flourish vigorously

in such shade);—if we see reason to believe that grave errors, such as these, have crept in among them, then we cannot but include them also in the causes which have led to poverty of religion and prevention to increase.

In looking at this question, we must ask the Friends for once to try and “see themselves as others see them.” We can obtain but a very imperfect view of a house by looking out of its own windows, and certainly cannot by doing so at all judge of its effect in the landscape. Not that our clear feelings of what is right should be guided by the judgment or opinion of others; but if we desire to know the effect of our acts upon the world, we must enter into the feelings of those who regard them from a very different point of view. And, in the present question, this is quite necessary, as we cannot judge how far others are justified in their distaste for these things, unless we take their views and feelings into consideration. We must endeavour to view the subject with a perfectly impartial eye, that, on the one hand, our judgment may not be unduly biased by prejudices in their favour, nor, on the other, be in any degree influenced by a desire to allow a greater freedom than would be warranted by a healthy state of religious feeling.

It is here particularly needful that we should again recollect the circumstances of the age out of which these arrangements took their rise. If we do so, we can scarcely fail to see, that, whatever degree of truth may have existed in their early ideas on these subjects, they were still, in no small degree, tinged with the spirit of Puritanism. And further, many objections that might in that day be rightly and reasonably urged to their uniting with the habits and practices of society, would of course lose their force according as their causes would disappear. And that they have so disappeared to a wonderful extent, that “the world” has become wiser and more rational, in many ways, is very apparent. Take, for instance, its costume—its “apparel.” Where is now the feathered and jewelled hat, the

satin and cloth of gold slashed and puffed doublet, the long silken hose, the jangling spurs and rapier of the gallant of the days of Charles II.? Or where can we find the buff coat and half armour, the trunk hose, the helmet and caliver and broadsword of Cromwell and his zealous host? There was need then for pure-minded men to avoid the extremes which prevailed on either hand ; to "testify against them" by their example in adopting a principle and a style of "plainness" and moderation. Their doing so made them "peculiar" in those days. But where now exists the necessity of keeping up a singularity of costume, more expensive, more difficult to be procured, less comfortable and convenient, and in reality less "plain" in not a few particulars, than that of an ordinary Christian Englishman at the present day? We admit there is still much room for improvement amongst the "daughters of England" in this respect ; but we ask, would not a move in the right direction be more likely to proceed from an example of moderation and of true taste (which is ever chaste and simple), combined with suitability and comfort, which are not discarded by any true religion, than by the adoption of a certain style of bonnet, or a particular preference for shades of drab or fawn colour. It is painful to us to be obliged even to allude to such things, but we feel our duty would be incomplete without exposing what we consider has, out of some good, grown into a great evil. We cannot believe the original principle ever contemplated the adoption of a form, or ever denied the right to change as often as the comfort, or the convenience, or the taste of the wearer desired it.

To observe plainness and moderation in our apparel—to avoid adopting superfluous and ridiculous fashions—to let our dress and appearance be such as will involve no undue amount of time or thought, to keep as far as possible from all incitements to pride and vanity: these are healthy and good moral sentiments and principles of action, approved by all good men, confirmed by scripture, and pointed out as Christian duties by the Spirit of all good; but

carried to excess, or beyond the required bounds, or degenerated into meaningless form, they become not only useless, but positively hurtful to the cause of true religion, and to its spread upon the earth. For weak human nature is so prone to catch at the form instead of the substance. It is so easy to *appear*, but so hard to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds."

With regard to their adoption of a style of Language slightly different from that in general use, there is also something to be said. Their objection to use the idiomatic plural "you," in addressing one person, instead of the more grammatically correct singular "thou," is based on the assumption that the plural term, so applied, involves flattery and untruth, by supposing the person addressed to be equal to two or more. They also object to use the English names of the days of the week and the months of the year, as Monday, Wednesday, January, December, &c., asserting that these were terms derived from the names of heathen deities. They decline addressing a gentleman as Mr., or a lady as Mrs. or Miss, on the assumption that this also involves untruth, *he* not being *their* master, and so forth.

Now there is certainly a stringency of conscience exhibited in these objections, which may be admired by some for its precision, no less than for the firmness with which its defenders upheld it in the midst of suffering and ridicule in their early days; but of their truth and usefulness in the present day we have by no means a high opinion. Is it really *the fact* that the term "you," as now commonly used, conveys the feeling to any one we so address, that we mean to compliment or flatter him by thus inferring that we consider him equal to two or more persons? Does the term Mr. *really* involve the conclusion that we believe the person so addressed *our master*? Does *he* take it so, or understand it so, or feel it so, or do *we* so mean it? And if it be *not the fact*, is it not a kind of practical absurdity to act on the supposition that *it is*?

Again, is it not a little strange that the Friends have not the

slightest scruple to call the planets Jupiter, and Venus, and Saturn, (who were, to say the least of it, quite as objectionable characters as Thor, or Woden, or Friga) ? We do not think any amongst them would object to call the beautiful constellation Orion by the same title given it in the book of Job, although its name is quite as much derived from a “heathen deity” as June or July, (which latter, by the way, as well as the remaining five months, are not derived from such names at all). Surely, if the principle be a sound one, it is worth carrying out.

There are some other arguments adduced by them for thus adopting a singularity of language, but, as this is not a controversial work, we can scarcely be expected here to enter into them. We doubt not an impartial and truth-seeking examination would shew them to be quite as sound and substantial as those we have already quoted. However, we must now leave the question to the decision of the Christian world. We desire not to wound the tender consciences of those who believe it right to adopt these usages ; but we cannot, in justice to the work before us, decline expressing our conviction that these singularities of language have added to the formalism which has weakened the religious vigour of the Society, have tended to a hurtful exclusiveness, and have been important preventives to the increase or extension of their valuable principles.

Their objection to Music we cannot find borne out either by Scripture or “right reason ;” and their stringent rules against amusements of any kind, exhibit, we think, stronger signs of Puritanic ascetism than of true Christian wisdom. It is an unsafe principle for the good to relinquish anything not wrong in itself because it is abused by the bad. To do so but increases the evil ; for by so leaving it to the bad only, they make it worse ; whereas, had the good remained and done their duty by it, their efforts would tend to remove the abuse, the evil would be lessened instead of increased, and the bad would be raised by the improvement, instead of being further debased by being left to themselves.

We desire not to dwell too long upon these subjects: it will be somewhat new, and, doubtless, painful to many amongst the Friends, to have the decisions of the Society thus called in question; but we are persuaded that honest impartial investigation cannot hurt any really good cause, and if injury has arisen from undue stringency, the sooner the cause of it is done away with, the better.

To take a general review of the whole question of these "peculiarities" in their bearing on the immediate subject of this essay, we cannot but conclude that the Friends have failed to convince the public mind of the correctness of their opinions and practices in these respects; that their attention to and persistence in them have rendered their peculiar profession very distasteful, not only to many true-minded Christians throughout the religious world, but, to a wide extent, to their own young people also, many of whom have left the Society, or been disunited from it, from not being able to see the correctness of these ideas, or the necessity of their conforming to the practices arising out of them. And if they have thus lost numbers from their own rank, how many more have been prevented joining them from the same reason? Do we not thus see in these peculiarities, another important cause of their declension and of the non-spreading of their principles?

We enter on a far more pleasing path of inquiry, when we turn to the consideration of the discipline of the Society of Friends.

Their system of internal government is republican in principle. They acknowledge Christ only as the head of the Church, and all the members as brethren one of another. The expenses of the Society are all met by voluntary contribution. Each locality where Friends become established has its own meetings, both for public worship and for the conducting of the discipline, in which every member is expected to take his or her proper part.

These smaller meetings submit certain reports and information of their state, from time to time, to larger or provincial meetings, held

quarterly or half-yearly, as the case may be; and these again, in their turn, are in the same way subordinate to the great annual assemblages held in the metropolitan towns. The Yearly Meeting of London has the final right of appeal¹ (in matters of doctrine) for the United Kingdom, and as to it come reports from the head meetings of Ireland and Scotland, we may consider it as representing the high court of parliament for quakerdom.

The objects of the discipline are manifold and excellent. The support of their principles and “*testimonies*” in all their integrity, the government of the unruly, the reformation of the erring, the encouragement of the weak and wavering, the provision for their poor, the education of their young, are but a few of the heads amongst the many admirable arrangements which enter into this excellent system of civil and religious policy.

From the hour of his birth until he is laid in his last narrow resting-place, every member of the Society is the object of the care and thoughtfulness of the body politic. His birth is registered in the books, and his name entered on the list of the members of his place of residence. His parents are recommended “to exercise a watchful care over his infant mind” and budding faculties, to guide them aright, and direct them to the best of purposes. His education is provided for: excellent schools have been established, where, for an amount proportioned to the ability and circumstances of the parent, the children are cared for and taught. In his early youth he is the object of the kind and tender care of more matured minds. In his removal to any other place, special care is taken, and certificates are forwarded, stating that he is a member, and recommending him to the “*Christian care*” of those amongst whom he is going. In his marriage, the Society have wisely set guards against hasty or imprudent steps; indeed, their recommendations and advices on this subject are such as, if attended to, can scarcely fail to procure a high degree of happiness. In his

life-long intercourse with his fellow-men, the important duties of justice in dealing, punctuality in the fulfilment of engagements, truth speaking and uprightness at all times and in the minutest matters, are strongly urged upon him, and enforced by the discipline in case of failure. If he believes himself called to fill the great and solemn duties of a minister of the Gospel, he is encouraged to be faithful to the promptings of the Spirit of God in his mind ; and if his ministry be considered to proceed from the right source, and not from the excitement or workings of his own imagination, he enjoys the kindest sympathy and warmest attachment and assistance of his friends.

But it would indeed be in vain in a work of this kind, to attempt to convey anything like a fair idea of the many excellences of these arrangements, nor is it our present object to do so. We must therefore be content with what has been pointed out, and, in summing up, again to express our opinion that the rules and arrangements comprised in the discipline of the Friends, are surpassingly wise and good, and well worthy of the admiration and imitation of many societies of far more extended influence and higher consideration in the religious world at the present time. And, recollecting that in its first establishment it was neither the contrivance nor the invention of the worldly wise or the learned, may we not conclude that the minds of its founders were indeed impelled by the love of God, and their understandings enlightened and their energies directed by his Spirit to those excellent arrangements ?

Whilst, however, fully conceding this, we cannot but believe, that, like all other institutions, no matter how high their origin, or how good their object, in the establishment of which man has been an agent, it, like them, partakes more or less of the imperfection of human nature. We must still believe it capable of further improvement. And if in itself it be not quite faultless, how much more may there be faults, and weakness, and want of due zeal in carrying

out its requirements in the spirit in which they were conceived and established !

It might naturally be expected, that, according as the Society degenerated in religious strength, a corresponding relaxation would take place in the conducting of the discipline. This is to a considerable extent very true. When, however, we come to look at the larger convocations of the body—these Yearly Meetings—we find them ever largely attended by those on whom the work rests in the remoter localities. It is through these that any alteration or modification in their system of Church government is made, and when we seek in their proceedings, from time to time, for any indication of retrogression or of advancement, we cannot perceive any decided symptoms of the system itself having suffered. Although many of their minutes and advices, issued from year to year, betray consciousness of their weakness, yet the spark was ever kept alive and bright, existing faults were strongly and forcibly dealt with, and we can plainly distinguish here and there no small traces of improvement.

But when we come to later times, we have increasing evidences of advancement. In fact, it would have been almost impossible for any well-constituted Society to resist the onward march of thought, the tide of which we see swelling with irresistible power in the present day. But, however interesting it might be to glance at the state of the Friends' discipline at the different stages of the Society's existence, and to see how far its administration was affected by their weakness, we cannot here do so. We can only speak from general conclusions, and from evidence derivable from such documents as the Society publish from time to time, their proceedings farther than these being very properly kept to themselves.

We therefore now turn to the more immediate question, whether the declension of the Society is in any degree attributable to the rules or arrangements it has adopted for its guidance or government.

We think, then, that a comprehensive review of the past state of the Society would lead to the conclusion, that lukewarmness and want of due zeal in carrying fully into effect the spirit of the discipline has far more tended to degeneracy than the imperfections we may find in the actual rules.

This weakness would, we believe, be found to manifest itself in several different ways; such as too great stringency in the construction of the letter of the Law, without duly bearing in mind the spirit of the Gospel, resulting in too hastily cutting off or disuniting from the body such as might have infringed its rules; the gradual falling into a lifeless formal manner of conducting the proceedings; an undue partiality towards any particular members, or an undue severity towards some particular class of offences; and last, but assuredly not least, an overweening fear of difficulties in the way.

We desire to avoid a censorious disposition, and do not by any means wish it to be inferred that these are faults of universal occurrence; but still we think the Friends themselves will see and feel that (more particularly in their smaller meetings) much of what we have pointed out has existed amongst them. If there be meetings happily exempt from any of these failings in the due administration of the discipline, we rejoice with them, and trustfully hope they may be long preserved in such a happy state. There may be others not yet awakened to a due sense of the presence of such weakness amongst them. May their eyes be opened to see these things in their true light! Many there doubtless are, who can feelingly acknowledge the picture as too true—who have been, and still are, crying like the prophet of old, “Woe is me, my leanness, my leanness!” By such may the strong weapon of “all prayer”* be remembered. May they be encouraged and made strong to their day’s work by the precious promises of Christ to the

* See “Pilgrim’s Progress.” Christian’s passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

humble and contrite ones. Let them cast away "the hindering things," and press forward with courage and hope in their allotted path of duty, remembering that the Lord's cause in the earth is as dear to Him as to us, and in his own good time He will carry it forward. And let each and every one endeavour to be a willing instrument in his Divine hand, to do his good pleasure in whatever way He may require.

But, besides the existence of weakness in carrying out the requirements of the discipline in its full spirit and integrity, we have to consider whether there is, or has been, any imperfection in the rules themselves, which can have tended to the results in question. Many slight alterations have been made in these from time to time, as the circumstances of the age developed new wants, or did away with the necessity for previous arrangements, or as the means of modification or simplification became manifest. Still there is work to be done, and it is a very pleasing feature of things amongst them at the present day, that there appears an increasing interest felt for the removal of imperfections that may have existed, and the substitution of better arrangements.

The attention of the collective body has been directed to the reconsideration of their marriage laws, and to the present construction of their rules respecting "plainness." They have found during later years no small difficulty in unanimously carrying out their "testimony," as to the payment of ecclesiastical demands, chiefly in consequence of certain alterations in the laws of the land affecting these matters.

Respecting the first of these, we believe the Society has done wisely in taking the matter into serious consideration. Many thoughtful and truly religious young minds have been lost to the Society from time to time in consequence of non-compliance. For instance, if a young person of either sex forms an attachment for

another not a member, the parties are precluded by the rules from marrying *in* the Society, and the member is cut off for "marrying in a manner contrary to the rules." Thus not only is the individual lost to the Society, but possibly his partner also, and almost certainly any offspring resulting from such marriage.

We think them morally and physically wise in their strong objections to the marriage of "first cousins;" but whether they should make this a ground of total disunity—whether they are warranted either "by Scripture or right or sound reason," in cutting off from religious communion, under all circumstances, any who offend in this respect, is a very different question. We are aware there is a strong feeling gaining ground towards the most liberal construction of these rules, and two cases have been lately reported, in which one of the parties (first cousins) was retained in membership, and the other "disowned." This occurred where the cousins were members of different meetings; that of which one was a member adhering to the usual custom of "disowning," whilst the other, considering the circumstances warranted their putting the more liberal construction on the rules, retained their member. This is, to say the least of it, an unpleasant position for husband and wife to be placed in. We will express no opinion as to the wisdom of the severer course. We presume it was done in all "Christian love and tenderness," which the Society is desired to exercise in all such cases. We leave thoughtful minds and Christian hearts to judge what results are likely to follow.

We shall not, however, here enter very deeply into the consideration of the marriage question. It is one which we are pleased to see the Friends have taken up, and trust their decisions as to future arrangements will be marked by Christian wisdom, and in accordance with that spirit of love and tenderness which should exhibit itself in active endeavour to gather all into the fold of the Good Shepherd. But, as far as affects their numbers at the present day,

we are clearly of opinion, that the rules hitherto existing on the subject have tended much more to their diminution than their increase.

In connexion with this subject is another observable fact, which must by no means be passed over; and that is the Numbers of Unmarried of both sexes in the Society. Many of these have far passed the meridian of life. But, looking at the younger members, we are really surprised at the great proportion of marriageable and yet unmarried. Now, why is this? Is it a right state of things? Most certainly not. "It is not good that man should be alone." The great duties of life require marriage for their fulfilment, and the greatest happiness attainable on this earth is only to be found when all the good and excellent feelings and faculties which a beneficent Creator has given us for wise purposes, can find their appropriate field of action.

The position of woman in the social scale precludes her from taking the initiative in this important step. It is therefore to the state of feeling amongst the young men that we must look, and to them we address ourselves for a solution of the question.

Why then, young men, is it so? You intend to marry late in life, do you, when you are rich enough? We tell you thousands have split upon this rock; you pursue a bubble you may never reach, and neglect the true riches which the blessing of heaven confers on the fulfilment of duty, and "whereunto no sorrow is added." But you are quite rich enough, are you, and would willingly marry if you met one "just suited to your mind?" Go to:—Do you imagine heaven will rain down its most precious gifts upon your heads? No; it is a good old saying, that "God helps those who help themselves." You must *know* before you can rightly esteem and love. Extend your acquaintance, then; prune away a little of your superfluous pride; act like true men. Do your duty in the

fear of God and the desire to please Him, and much mistaken we are if you do not soon find your reward.

“Ah! but,” say a third class, “neither of these views suit our case: we long for the day which may put it in our power *prudently* to undertake the responsibilities of married life.” Well, for some, perhaps many amongst you, prudence may be very well for the present. To such we say, look that you extend your very commendable “prudence” to your *present outlay*; defer not the wished-for day by your trifling (?) extravagances, or your want of industry and diligence; see that you fulfil all your present duties; seek for best help and guidance in your endeavours, and for His blessing on all you undertake, and in due time your day of rejoicing will come.

Again, others will plead, “we have tried hard and really can’t get on: we fear we shall never be able to marry.” It might be well for *you* to consider that woman was given as a “helpmeet” to man. Perhaps if you had a true helpmeet she might much assist and forward your exertions. It is a well-known fact, that many women are literally “the *better halves*.” We do not recommend you hastily to rush into marriage for such a reason; but it might do no harm for you to look at it in this light, and try then and see whither your duty to Heaven and yourself would lead you.

We have before, more than once, spoken on the subject of “Plainness;” so that, with reference to the action of the discipline in this direction, it only here remains to say, that we believe the right principle has been overstrained and *formalised*, (if we may use such a term,) to a degree hurtful to the religious vigour of the Society, and preventive to the spreading of its influence; and we think it a pleasing feature of their present state, that they are now engaged in the endeavour to bring their rules more into accordance with the real requirements of a sincere and unformal “Christian profession.”

Since the earliest days of the Society, its members have borne a firm, though passive, resistance to the payment of tithes and other ecclesiastical demands, believing that the ministry of the Gospel should be free and unpaid for. Their rules on this subject require their members to suffer in any way rather than compromise this "testimony." Recent changes in the laws of the land, (for instance, the substitution of a "rent charge" for the direct payment of "tithes,") have placed some difficulty in the way of fully carrying out the rules which applied to a previous state of things; and at present there prevails no small want of unanimity as to what is a compromise of the principle, and what is not. On this subject the rules should be very clear and explicit. If the principle be a good one, it ought certainly to be carried out, and if not, the sooner it be changed the better. If it be impracticable to carry out the present arrangements, they ought to be brought into accordance with existing circumstances, without compromising the principle. We think these rules require reconsideration and amendment; and it has long been our decided conviction, that had the Friends exhibited half the amount of energy and Christian determination in rational and constitutional attempts to do away with what millions object to as well as themselves, that they have done in this passive submission to the sufferings entailed on them by this cause, it would have gone much farther in removing the evil.

Before passing away from the consideration of the discipline, there is one more duty involved in its requirements which we cannot pass over in silence, as we deem it one of much importance, the neglect of which would be an immediate and serious cause of degeneracy, and the honest and conscientious discharge of which would doubtless tend in a very high degree to the strengthening of the weak, the encouragement of the humble, and the general health and vigour of religious life amongst the members. We mean the subject of "Oversight." The rules and advices under this head are exceed-

ingly valuable, and breathe a spirit of true Christian earnestness and of heartfelt desire for the religious welfare of all its members.

In each meeting there are certain members specially appointed as the “Overseers” of the flock in that particular place. The duties allotted to them* are, “to extend Christian care to the unfaithful” amongst those “professing the same truth as themselves;” to inform the ignorant; to strengthen the weak; to encourage the tender; to seek out the scattered; to warn the unruly; to caution the unwary; to deal firmly, yet in love and meekness, with any who may act in opposition to the required “testimonies;” to administer private counsel and admonition where needful, and where that appears ineffectual, to report the case to the Church.”

In other religious sects, duties such as these are required of the paid ministers of the body, who are also expected to visit the sick and administer consolation to the afflicted, and to attend at the bed of death. But in a society constituted as that of Friends, such an appointment as this is absolutely indispensable, and the full discharge of the useful offices involved appears to us to be of vital consequence to its health and vigour.

But the advices on this subject extend much further; they recommend that “*all* Friends watch over one another for good,” and say most truly, “that the exercise of Christian care in this way tends to strengthen the bands of fellowship, and is useful both to those who give and to those who receive it.” They “earnestly desire that every appearance of good may be cherished, that counsel and encouragement may be extended to the young and inexperienced, and a parental care exercised over those who appear to be in danger of wandering from the fold of Christ.”

Now, were these important duties fairly carried into practice; earnestly entered into, from the impelling power of the love of God, and his cause in the heart;—from a desire to help on a brother in the way so blessed to ourselves;—from a deep sense that each and

* Book of Minutes, “Oversight,” p. 178.

every one has his part to act in promoting the knowledge of the Lord in the earth,—were considerations such as these the motives to an oversight for good such as has been pointed out, what increase of strength would it not give to the body at large !

We may now query : Have these duties been fully carried out ? Has the Society gained all it might, firstly, by the public and recognized care of its appointed “ overseers ;” and secondly, by the brotherly interchange of Christian watchfulness between all its members ? Or has it lost by want of sufficient attention to this subject ? Is the weakness it has experienced in any degree attributable to the imperfect fulfilment of this highly important duty ?

Much we fear that clear answers cannot be returned to these questions.

Has it been the living and active concern of the overseers throughout the body, to “ inform the ignorant,” to “ strengthen the weak,” “ to encourage the tender,” and to “ seek out the scattered ?” or has their attention been *too much* given to the cultivation and care of “ the hedge ;” to the repairing of “ breaches in the walls :” and *too little* to the culture of the precious flowers within, (which might have been the stronger for a little more sun and wind ;) too little to the building up and perfecting of the city itself, which being “ set upon an hill could not be hid,” and which being founded upon a rock, the gates of hell could not prevail against it.

In conclusion, we cannot but assign the want of a more full and perfect Oversight, both official and private, as one of the causes of weakness amongst Friends.

Connected with the subject of the discipline, is a matter which may be of some assistance to us in forming a clear idea of the general question before us.

In every healthy state of society—whether religious, social, or political—where individual opinion is allowed right and free ex-

pression, it is generally found that the minds of its active members belong to either of two classes: those who are satisfied with the present arrangements, and wish them to continue; or those who, desiring a better state of things, work towards what they consider improvement. We may call the first of these the Conservative, the second the Progressive, element. It is in deep and true wisdom that society is thus constituted. These two powers working together act as a healthy check on each other. Were the Progressive element alone to reign, it would be too much sail and too little ballast. Did the Conservative alone exist, stagnation would be the result. Society is most likely to experience the benefit of a lively and rational improvement, where the two powers are well balanced.

Now, we think, even a general review of the working of the Friends' discipline, for a century previous to the last few years, will lead to the conclusion that the Conservative element was in a decided ascendancy. Here we find another not very remote cause of the non-advance of the Society. We have, however, said, "within the last few years;" and here we may once more allude to the change that has taken place, and the evident and most pleasing signs of improvement that of later years have been developing themselves.

Self-complacency once done away with—spiritual pride subdued—the idea that "I am holier than thou," felt to be sinful and false—the belief that God's blessed Spirit extends over all his church, and may and does impel the pen, or the acts, or the words, of other ministers than their own, (who truly and prayerfully seek its help and presence,) and incites truly good men to truly good works all the world over,—this unselfish liberality of feeling and principle opens the eyes to self-weakness, and is an evident symptom of an improving state. The inquiry, What is Truth? abounds throughout all society at the present day. The Friends have not escaped. Old principles are narrowly questioned and looked into; old prejudices are called up for judgment; old habits and practices are

desired to give an account of themselves, and state their claims to our regard. There is a general inquiry, Are we perfect? Can we improve? What are abuses? Whence is weakness? God's command is, "Cry aloud and spare not;" "Speak to my people that *they go forward!*" Forward from deadness to liveliness, from weakness to strength, from lukewarmness to holy zeal, from empty formalism to Christian truth and liberty!

Apart from subjects coming under either the head of religious doctrine or church discipline, there is one which has been sometimes put forward as a reason for the declension of Friends. We allude to the idea that it has been in no small degree consequent on the increased affluence of many amongst them. It is true that the habitual industry, diligence, and sobriety of the Friends have been attended with their usual reward, and from time to time many families amongst them have risen from a comparatively humble position in life to the enjoyment of a large income, and in some cases to the possession of considerable riches. It has been asserted that a rich family seldom continues for more than three generations in the Society. Now we know not what degree of truth there may be in such an assertion; but to conclude therefrom that true Quakerism is incompatible with an independent position in the world, argues, in our opinion, a very low estimate of what true Quakerism really is or ought to be. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"* This was said of the rich man who turned away sorrowful when he was told to go and sell all he had, and to come and follow Him, the Saviour of men. The words of the Redeemer continue true now as then, and truly the rich, ever supplied with the ready means of gratifying their passions, and of indulging the weakness of their nature, are specially liable to be led away by an undue love of this world and its enjoyments,

* Mark x. 23.

from the self-denying requirements of a true and pure Christianity. But He that thus pointed out the difficulty, added the consoling antidote, that "with God all things are possible"**—thus shewing that if they abide in Him, they are equally the objects of his care and guidance. Are we then to believe, that because the way is difficult, the rich must necessarily fall therein?—that because it is narrow, they cannot walk in it? Are we quite certain, that in the pride and bigotry of man—in the meddlesomeness and "creaturely activity" (as it is called) of sectarian feeling—or, to speak mildly, in the weakness of narrow-minded (though perhaps well-meaning) religionists—the way has not been "narrowed" much more than was *ever designed* by the Blessed Founder of a pure and lovely Christianity. Has it not occurred in these later times, that men have bound "heavy burdens grievous to be borne," and laid them on their own shoulders, and then gone on through life mourning and lamenting because they could not carry them? We firmly believe that true and enlightened views of wherein true religion really consists, will clearly shew that such has been and is the case. Many are the "stumbling-blocks" still lying in the way, which were never placed there by the Author of all good. Is it not a libel on Divine wisdom to say in one breath, that "the diligent hand maketh rich," or, that "He blesses the endeavours of the industrious with success;" and in the next, that the way which He has cast up is too narrow for them to walk in? It cannot be so. Facts are against it. Quakerism has received some of its brightest sunbeams through its richer members. Religion exists amongst rich as amongst poor. Poverty has its impediments to progress in the true path as well as riches.

But in the *road* to wealth lie many dangers. Of these let all beware who aspire to the name of followers of the Just and True One. Let strict truthfulness and integrity continue; let the golden

* Mark x. 27.

rule, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you," be ever borne in mind: let the glory of God and the fulfilment of his will, and the spread and increase of his knowledge, be the deep under-current of our motives in our intercourse with the world. Let all carry into the practice of their lives the recommendation of Him who came into the world "that through Him we might have life," that we should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things should be added unto us."* Let all rely in confidence on the fulfilment of that promise, if they observe the condition. Thus would the poor be made rich indeed in a holy and peaceful confidence in their Heavenly Caretaker; thus would the rich be preserved from falling into temptation; thus would all be built up together, "as lively stones, into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus."†

Having now considered, although in the very cursory manner required by a work of this kind, the various subjects involved in the question of the declension of the Society of Friends, it only remains for us, before concluding, to pass in review the course of our arguments, that by thus looking at them in a more condensed form, we may the more easily see their bearing on the general enquiry.

Assuming, then, in the first place, that it is the design of God, in omniscient wisdom, that the knowledge of Him and His will should yet "cover the earth, as the waters cover the seas," and that this work is a gradual one, we extract events from the pages of history, both sacred and profane, shewing prominent points where the development of this design becomes apparent. We see light admitted little by little up to the appearance of Christ our Saviour, and his truth spread more and more by God's working through human instrumentality up to the present day. We have

* Matt. vi. 33.

† 1 Peter ii. 5.

endeavoured to shew that the Society of Friends were, in their turn, entrusted with a high and important mission in this great work, namely, the development of the spiritual nature of true religion, and of its practical effects upon the lives, conduct, and morality of man ; and further, that whilst in their early days they proved themselves strong and vigorous servants of Christ in forwarding this work, yet that after a time they became weaker, and that at the present time, when the surrounding world has so far advanced in much that is really good and true, they, as a Society, instead of having spread and increased in proportion to the general increase, have actually diminished in numbers, and by no means occupy the position, or possess the influence in the religious world, that the truth of their principles should entitle them to, were they less hampered with formalities, and more clearly understood and practised by those who profess them.

We have considered in detail what we regard as defects or imperfections,—firstly, in their apprehensions of religious principle ; next in their moral arrangements ; then in the working out of their church discipline ; and, lastly, glanced at some of the external circumstances which may be assigned as tending to the result in question.

It is very difficult indeed, within the limits of an essay such as the present, to enter fully into the discussion of so many important matters, or to anticipate and meet the many objections that may be made to our conclusions. There is scarcely a subject we have broached, that would not afford matter for a volume. But the duty set before us, and which we have endeavoured to fulfil, was a simple one, to state what appears to us to be the causes of the past degeneracy and the declension in numbers of the Society of Friends in the United Kingdom.

If we have succeeded in doing so truly and clearly, we have but to trust that the effort will be blessed to those for whom it may be intended, and to make the humble and sincere acknowledgment,

that such success has been by the assistance and blessing of that Power which is ever ready to respond to our prayers for its availing help, in accordance with the encouraging promise of our gracious Lord, " Ask and it shall be given unto you,

"SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND."*

Although the discovery and statement of these Causes was the direct task assigned us, yet we cannot take leave of our readers without offering a few suggestions as to what appears to us the best means of removing the imperfections and weakness pointed out, of strengthening the cause of truth, and promoting the knowledge of the Lord and the kingdom of Christ in the earth.

As regards the religious principles of the Society of Friends (considered in their purity), we believe them to be so far identified with "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God,"† that its members, in clearly apprehending, and being individually faithful to those principles, may add to their collective strength, may recover from past feebleness, may yet occupy their right position in the world, and, instead of having to complain of degeneracy and declension, may yet have to rejoice in being led forward from strength to strength.

We do not mean to depreciate in the least from the claims of other professions, far from it ; these, too, have, doubtless, important places designed for them by the Great Head of the Church, and are the objects of his care and guidance, as well as the Society whose cause we have had before us. We only desire to repeat our conviction, that there is nothing in these principles which would disqualify their adherents from filling a most useful place in the universal Church of Christ—it may be, from becoming as shining lights in the world—did knowledge keep pace with truth, and faithfulness with knowledge.

* Matt. vii. 7.

† Rom. xii. 2.

How, then, is this most desirable result to be brought about ? How is this perfect health and vigour of the body to be attained ?

The body is composed of many members, and unless each and every member be in health, the body suffers. This appears very simple, and is, doubtless, very true ; but it will take a little calm consideration to be more clearly and fully apprehended. Many will say, " Oh ! it is just coming to the old argument of individual faithfulness again." Well, granted, and a very sound good argument it is too. The only question about it is—faithfulness to what ? Is it faithfulness to the prevalent customs, and habits, and ideas, and practices of the Society ; or is it faithfulness to our own honest convictions of duty to our Heavenly Father and Friend, to our ever-blessed Saviour and Redeemer ?

But how indignantly will many amongst them repudiate the idea that these can possibly be in any degree antagonistic. Well, if not, so much the easier for the faithful, say we ; but how many in the present day can feelingly testify to the contrary . Surely nothing is so easy as to act as we have been accustomed to act ; no lesson so difficult as to unlearn what we have been taught as true. No self-denial so painful as to oppose ourselves to the approbation and good opinion of those we love and esteem. But here the very means of renovation consists in the repudiation of abuses, the substitution of a purer faith, and of a practice more in accordance with the increasingly well-known institutions of Divine wisdom.

To what, then, you inquiring ones, are you to be faithful ?

Give good heed, and dwell upon, and encourage, the very first or faintest DESIRE after good. Pray earnestly to your Father above to open your eyes to see his pure truth. Come to Him " as little children* for instruction—knowing nothing—having no prejudice, or expectation, or will, as to how or where that truth may lead you—not believing beforehand that you will find it in accordance with any

* Matt. xviii. 1-3.

preconceived ideas ; but as a blank page, ready to be inscribed by the Divine hand—making no mental reservation—having no wish, save only that the writing there may be God's own blessed truth, in such measure as he may be pleased to grant it to you. Thus will your hearts be inclined by Him to receive his law and to know his will ; thus, by his free grace, by the influence of his Spirit in your hearts, will you become aware of your sinful state, and thus be induced, in the humble sincerity of true repentance, to utter the cry which angels ever rejoice to hear, “God be merciful to me, a sinner ;”* and, like the poor publican, you will feel the assurance of being “justified rather than the other.”† For, when you thus come to feel the need of a Saviour, his love will run to meet you, as did the father of the other poor prodigal “when he yet saw him a great way off.”‡ Thus you will come to behold glorious things out of his law. You will delight to meditate in the inspired record of his will and of his works ; and thus will your understandings be opened rightly to interpret and appreciate these divine writings. Christ will become precious to your souls. For you will feel and realize that in Him there is life, and through Him there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption. With such a faith pervading your minds, and exhibiting its power in your acts, how strong would you come forth to join with the mighty in forwarding the Lord's cause in the earth in accordance with his will ! Before an army thus furnished with the “sword of the Spirit,” and “the shield of faith,” and the “breastplate of righteousness,”§ how soon would abuses fall and prejudices fade away ! how soon would truth take the place of error, fearfulness give way to Christian courage ! One would indeed “chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.”|| But there must be sincerity, there must be faith, there must be patience, there must be obedience.

Let ALL then seek to feel the importance of individual ENDEAVOURS

* Luke xviii. 13.

† Ibid. 14.

‡ Ibid. xv. 20.

§ Eph. vi. 14 17.

|| Deut. xxxii. 30.

after right and truth, of individual FAITHFULNESS in acting out fully and honestly their convictions of duty, and of individual INFLUENCE amongst their fellow-men. Thus would wrong be set right, imperfections removed, degeneracy exchanged for advancement, declension for increase—religion made practical, delightful, beautiful, and simple—and the love of God and the knowledge of Christ spread abroad more and more throughout the world.

In the attainment of this great result, there may, however, be collateral aids, which we must not omit to consider. Amongst the most important of these we would name, a rightly and freely exercised Social and Religious Intercourse. We desire the Friends may put the question to themselves,—how far this exists, and how far an increase of it might be useful to them as a society. Do those who consider themselves the more “orthodox” or “consistent” amongst them, really carry out the spirit of the discipline in “strengthening the weak” and “encouraging the tender?” Are they ever ready to “give an answer of the hope that is in them,” to young inquiring minds? Do they, by their manner and habits, encourage a healthy confidence in the “little ones?” Is there too much “caste” still amongst them? Why should the Society be divided into “consistent Friends,” and “nominal Friends?” And is the line of division a right one? Are the “nominal” Friends likely to be made “consistent” by the example and practice of the others? Are not the terms, “consistency” and “plainness” misapplied? Is “simplicity” so great a virtue, so important and so desirable a state, as is sometimes supposed? We do not find it so much as named amongst the “fruits of the spirit,” (Gal. v. 22). We think, did a healthier intercourse, both social and religious, but particularly the latter, exist between the old and the young, the “orthodox” and the yet unconvinced, the fathers and the children, that the result would be highly beneficial to all parties. It would tend to remove misunderstanding on either

side ; youth might learn from the wisdom of age, and age be cheered by finding unsuspected worth in youth. It would soon show that far more good would come from “consistency” holding out a helping hand to “inexperience,” than by wrapping itself up in a cloak of exclusiveness. It would discover how much of truth and goodness lay on the *outside* of the “hedge,” so carefully cultivated, the thickness and closeness of which had hitherto concealed the rich harvest that the All-merciful had been raising outside it. Yes, the hearts of many sincere ones would be gladdened by knowing this, could they but encourage a kindly confidence in those around them, and lay aside a little of their unprofitable fear of laying open their faith and their hope to the view of those who, in the right order of things, would naturally look to them for instruction, help, or encouragement in their Christian course.

Another powerful medium for the dissemination of knowledge and the interchange of opinion, has until lately been taken comparatively very little advantage of by the Society. We, of course, allude to the Press. True, they have from time to time published lives and travels, and tracts, and “approved writings” of Friends ; but in the circulation of a periodical literature of their own, and in the possession of a means for the eliciting and discussion of topics of interest to themselves, they have been sadly deficient ; indeed, as far as we can learn, it is only of comparatively recent date, that such has at all existed amongst them, and it is still of very limited extent. However, such as it is, we must say we consider it likely to be of very great benefit. It extends to remote places information of the proceedings of the body at head-quarters, and thus tends to create an interest not previously felt. It deals with prevalent abuses and elicits opinion on both sides. It takes cognizance of many subjects which the regular discipline may not have yet got hold of, and tends to draw out, or it may be in degree to direct, public opinion. And were such a literature to be of a character, and conducted in such a manner, as to induce a more extended and general interest, how

much would it not tend to set the Society right *with the public!* Doubtless, even in this present "enlightened age" much ignorance and misunderstanding prevail regarding the Society and its principles. Would not their truths be thus more likely to be cleared away from the excrescences which conceal them from the view of many anxious inquirers, and their usefulness made a blessing to many? And if anything of error lurking in them thus came to light, so much the better say we. Let them fear not for Truth: it stands on a firm basis—it will bear the light. Set not your candle under a bushel: let it shine before men.

One more powerful accessory to religious advancement before we conclude. It is that of Family Worship or Prayer.

Have the Friends, in their attempts to spiritualize religion and to avoid the empty form, taken too much from the practical means within their reach—means which doubtless tend to growth in religious life, and afford certain opportunities for the exercise of many important Christian gifts and duties? We are aware it is their habit to "sit still" before meals, and to read a small portion of Scripture once or twice daily, in the families of most Friends. But is there no further duty required at their hands in this way? Would it not be well if families came together daily to unite in their petitions to their Heavenly Protector? when the parent might lead the child to the Throne of Grace, or instruct it in the way of wisdom; when the hearts of husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, might, thus gathered together in His name who promised to be with the two or three, enjoy for a few brief moments a sense of His presence, and receive from His hand a portion of that "daily bread" which would nourish and strengthen the new life within them. What an opportunity would such a time afford for a sound exposition of the Scriptures from experience to youth, for sincere and open enquiry from youth to wisdom! and how would wisdom discover its weakness and be

afresh incited to progress, that it might meet the demands thus made upon it ! Would not there be “pastors and teachers” then found ? Would not the gift of “exhortation to edifying in love” be far more freely exercised amongst them ? Let those who wish to grow in grace and in the kingdom of God and his Christ, and in the experience of his blessed Spirit, think seriously of these things, and see what duty may be required at their hands.

And if not only the Society, whose cause these pages have discussed, but all who feel the importance of such considerations, were thus, individually and collectively, sincerely and earnestly to endeavour to carry out the designs of the ever-blessed Founder of our most precious faith, would not their labours indeed tend to the “perfecting of the saints, to the work of the ministry, to the edifying of the body of Christ ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ?”*

* Eph. iv. 12, 13.

THE END.

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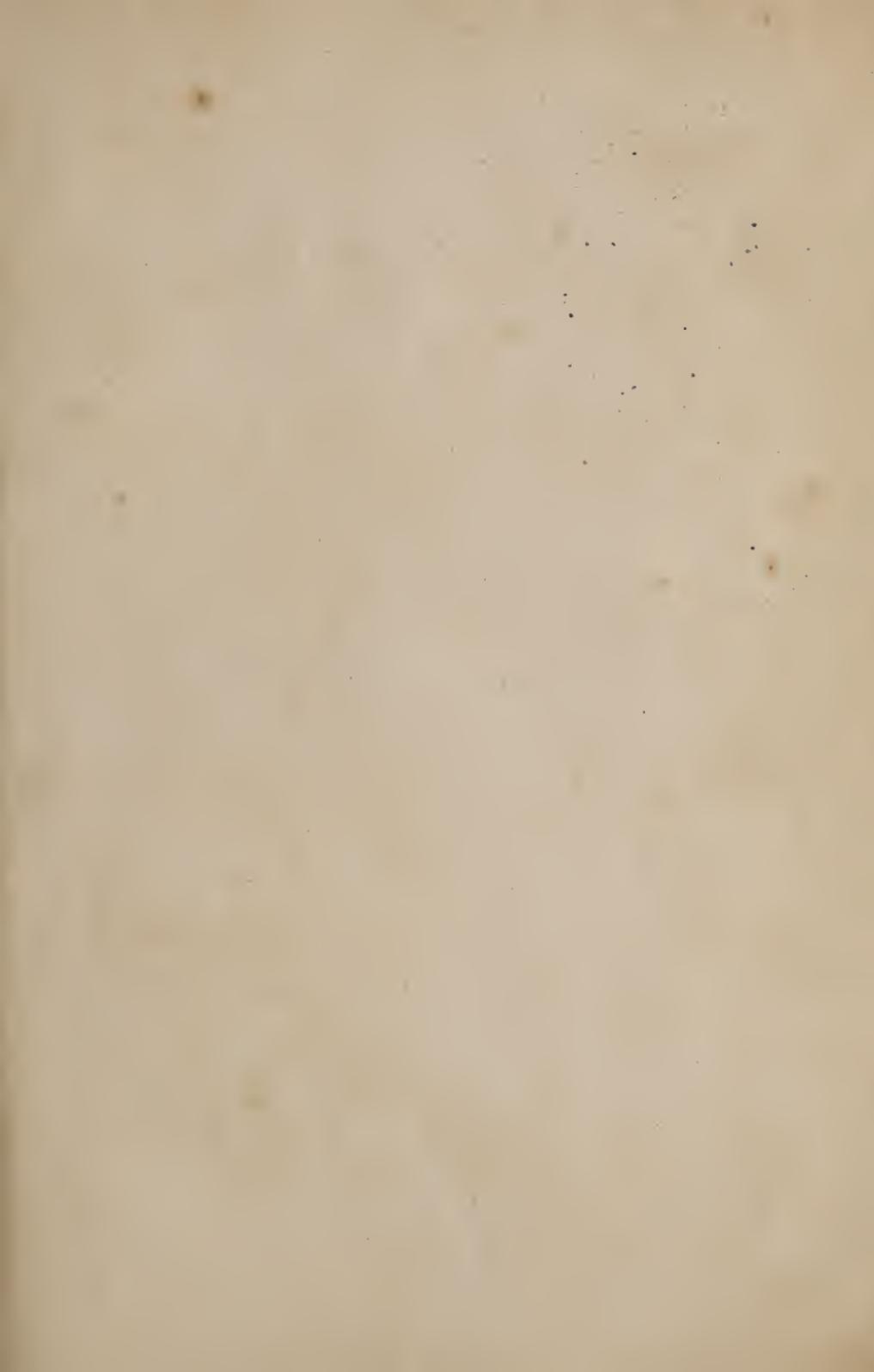
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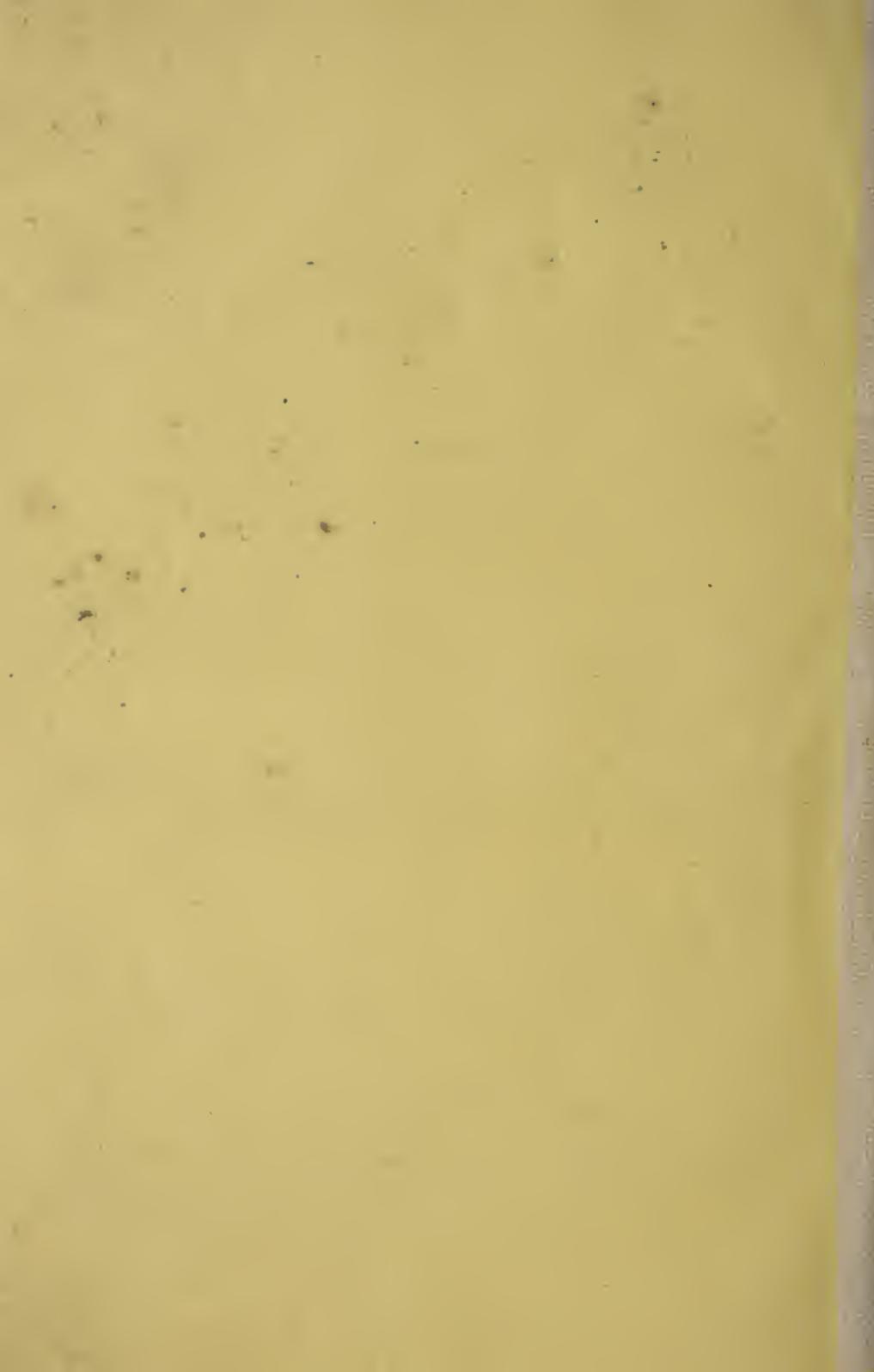
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